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POST ROCK EXTENSION ANSWERS

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There are many “tools” available for beef producers to increase the productivity and profitability of their cow herds. One of those tools is pregnancy checking. The time to perform this is quickly approaching for some or already happened for others. Pregnancy checking early on has many benefits.

This time of year, pasture quality has already or is beginning to deteriorate. This forces some producers to provide supplementation which can become costly. Some producers may also be considering or planning for early weaning to combat this. By pregnancy checking early, cows that have gone unsettled can be culled out of the herd reducing grazing pressure on pastures. This also provides marketing advantages. Selling non-pregnant cows now when they weigh more and prices are seasonally higher provides the opportunity for producers to capture more value from these cows than leaving the calves on the cows and waiting to pregnancy test at traditional weaning times.

Pregnancy checking is also a perfect time to evaluate the cows. Make a checklist prior that will allow you to do a complete assessment during this time. The following is a checklist compiled by former extension veterinarian Dr. Larry Hollis.

*Are there cows that show up as problem animals that should not be kept even if found to be pregnant? To make significant herd improvement, you need to get rid of the bottom producers in your herd each year.

*Does the cow always calve late in the calving season? Remember, it costs just as much to feed a late-calving cow through the winter as an early-calving cow, but the late-calving cow will rarely produce as many pounds of live calf.

*Are any cows old enough that you need to look closely at their teeth while you have them in the chute?

*Examine the cows physically before putting them through the chute. Are there cows that have udder problems, eye problems, lameness, or are in poor body condition that may interfere with their ability to winter well and calve easily next spring? If so, there is no reason to run them through the chute unless you want to try to sell them as a bred cow (assuming they are found to be pregnant).

*When pregnancy checking, ask your veterinarian to age the pregnancies. If there are cows that will calve later, you may want to sell them as bred cows. By selling off the late calvers, you can tighten up your calving and subsequent breeding seasons. This should also increase the average calf sale weight for all cows that you carry through the winter.

*Vaccinate and deworm cows that are pregnant and otherwise fit your requirements for them to stay in the herd.

To accurately and efficiently conduct early pregnancy exams on large groups of cows, the exams should be performed from 26 to 30 days after the last possible breeding if using ultrasound for

pregnancy diagnosis. If using rectal palpation, pregnancy exams should be conducted 35 to 40 days after the cows are bred.

For example, herds calving in mid to late January would have a bull turnout or artificial insemination date around April 15. If the producer is using a 45-day breeding season, this herd would be ready to pregnancy check with ultrasound around June 29 and with palpation per rectum on July 9. However, a herd that calves toward the end of April (July turnout) and has an 85-day breeding season will not be ready to pregnancy check until the first or second week in November.

Thus, producers with herds that calve in January through March or even late April and have a short breeding season can take advantage of early pregnancy checking to market cull cows prior to the historic market downturn of November.

Removing open cows from the herd always pays dividends. Non-pregnant heifers and cows, as well as cull/bred cows, can provide as much as 20% of the gross income to a cow-calf operation on an annual basis. Taking advantage of opportunities to effectively add value to and market these cows through the use of timely pregnancy diagnosis along with an understanding of market seasonality can allow producers to capture more profit from this segment of the cow-calf operation.

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